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CIA Chief Here, Says It Needs More Secrecy

By Bill Soiffer

The CIA is having trouble keeping secrets, the agency's director, Stansfield Turner, told a San Francisco Press Club luncheon yesterday.

As a result, Turner said, the CIA is seeking greater independence from congressional watchdog committees and other restraints that have forced it to reveal classified information, reduced the agency's ability to respond to crises, and sapped the morale of U.S. agents.

"The greatest threat facing U.S. intelligence capabilities is the reduction in our ability to keep secrets," Turner said. "It is an issue of First Amendment rights, whether we can have better secret intelligence and still respect the Constitution."

The director of central intelligence, who said he was "refurbishing" the agency's tarnished image by his appearance before the media yesterday, then outlined four areas of legislative "remedies" to protect its secrets.

The legislation sought by Turner would reduce the number of congressional committees having a right to review covert CIA operations and amend the Freedom of Information Act to protect CIA secrets. "I assure you it is difficult to recruit volunteers (for a mission) if I have to admit I'm going up to Capitol Hill to tell 200 people about

it," he said.

Turner commented that CIA agents feel threatened by the Freedom of Information Act. "Our sources are not convinced their secrets can be kept. We are constantly being challenged in court and our agents wonder if we'll keep winning those cases."

He also called for making the disclosure of the identity of CIA agents a crime and support for a bill that would limit a defendant's access to CIA secrets during a trial. Turner, a former Navy admiral who has held the top CIA post for 3½ years, compared the CIA's efforts to protect its sources with efforts by reporters to keep their sources confidential.

He said the CIA will be required to provide better intelligence during the 1980s because of a growing Russian military threat.

"For the first time," he said, "foreign policy must be based on the perception by the Soviets of something like military parity with the United States."

In response to a question about freeing the American hostages, Turner said that the "options in Iran are very limited," adding that "there are a half dozen separate power centers in Iran and the hostages are being used as pawns between these groups. I don't see any one of these groups coming to power."